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# The Dragon Nobles



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## Chapter 1 by Matthew Wright

Flinching at every trill of a bird and rustle of leaves, I crept through the elves' forest of giant trees and strange animals. Slipping through a cluster of trees with mottled, brown-green bark, I noticed a stag with snow-white fur and velvet horns. Silently, I pulled my bow free of the quiver and slipped an arrow onto the string.

## Chapter 2 by Harlander



I muttered prayers. To the soul of the deer, which would soon be free from its mortal coil, I offered thanks for the bounty I'd take from its flesh. To the spirits of the woods, I begged permission for what I was about to do. And to the faint and distant gods of man, I murmured pleas for aid.

The bowstring creaked loudly in the quiet of the glade. The arrow made little more than a whisper as it cut the air. The deer stumbled and fell in silence, its soul slipping free with barely a struggle.

I crept towards the beast. It was magnificent, and I was struck with the feeling that I had

defaced something both beautiful and holy.

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I swore that no part of the creature I had slain would I have known, then, that I was watched by hunters who

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Chapter 3 by SaintSayaka



Still, like any good hunters, they did not strike at me. I was too powerful. No, they would wait for the weakest of my pack to straggle into their trap.

Nohr stumbled into view, grey bangs covering her otherwise bright and childlike eyes. "Is it over?" she asked. I smiled. For a huntress, she sure did despise watching the actual death of an animal.

"Yes. Take a look."

Cautiously, as if expecting a trap, she inched towards the massive being. Satisfied with its still breast, she got to work tying its ivory hooves together with a complexation of knots I had only ever seen in books. Eventually, our kill was hanging off of a wooden contraption, upside down. The entire business was done within three minutes. Good - we had to shell it out of there if we wanted to keep our hides.

The elves aren't exactly pleased with the disappearance with their animals. I can't blame them. The deer that we've bagged must be at least one hundred years old. But perhaps if they didn't tax our people so harshly, and steal all of our wheat...I shook my head. Such thoughts would not help me escape the woods. Nohr forged the road ahead, keeping a watchful eye for pitfalls and steel teeth.

What she should have been watching for was the first arrow.

#### Chapter 4 by



It buzzed passed me as the silent wind. With a solid thunk, a burrowed into a tree that sat only inches from my face. I cried out, understanding our situation immediately. Nohr spun around in a panic and gasped, staring at me. "No, I didn't get hit! Get down!" I growled. She dropped down to the ground, and I pulled out another arrow. Pulling the bowstring tight, I waited for another attack.

*Breathe.*

*Focus.*

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There was no response. I began scanning the shrubbery where she had taken refuge but came up empty-handed. A small wheeze erupted into a fit of coughs, and I glanced over to my right. "Oh, stars... Nohr!" I cried softly. Shuffling over, I dug through the leaves. The feathers of the arrow appeared first, and my heart sunk.

Clawing now, I finally brushed her soft hair. I grabbed her shoulders and pulled her into a sitting position, causing her to yelp weakly. Red stained my hands as I laid her back down and held her head. An arrow had struck home just under her collarbone, and she was left wheezing and shaking. "Nohr... No! Stars no! Get up!" I bawled. A stick cracked just in front of me, and I looked up. Three dark figures stood, one in the lead. They seemed to hover just above the ground, their hooded heads revealed little but a featureless face masked in the shadows.

It was *Them*.

Their breathing seemed labored and yet... very still. They loomed over me and the dwindling form of Nohr for a few seconds. "Leave her alone!" I grunted, emotion stinging my eyes. The figure in the front stepped forward and outstretched a hand. My vision swam with blinding white dots that clouded out every thought.

*No. No. No.*

The two remaining figures approached and lifted Nohr off of my lap. They began to move away slowly, and then they were gone. The *thing* that touched my head slowly removed its hand from me, and my vision cleared. I gagged the effects of dizziness washing over me. I swung my hand back and grabbed an arrow. There was no time for a bow.

The *Thing* began to move backward, desiring to follow its friends, but while it was still close, I thrust the arrow upwards. With a heavy thunk, I found my target. The creature shrieked as the pain and fear drove my hand to push the arrow farther. It swung and shuttered as I matched its howls with my own. It tumbled forward and grabbed my skull with both of its icy hands. Blinding light. Staggering pain.

The forest around me went black.

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